FRANKISH RURAL SETTLEMENT IN THE LATIN KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

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First published 1998
First paperback edition 2002

Typeface Bembo 10½/12½ pt.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Ellenblum, Ronnie.
Frankish rural settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem / Ronnie Ellenblum.
p. cm.
Includes bibliography and index.
ISBN 0 521 55401 2 (hc)
1. Jerusalem – History – Latin Kingdom, 1099–1244. 2. Land settlement – Jerusalem – History. 3. Human settlements – Jerusalem – History. 4. Jerusalem – Population – History. 5. Jerusalem – Ethnic relations.
D179.E44 1996
956.94'03–dc20 96-32621 CIP

ISBN 0 521 55401 2 hardback
ISBN 0 521 52187 4 paperback

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(cartographer: T. Soffer)

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CHAPTER ONE

A SEGREGATED SOCIETY OR AN INTEGRATED SOCIETY?

In many studies published in the last forty years the common analysis concludes that Frankish rural settlement in the Levant was very limited. The Franks, it was argued, confined themselves almost exclusively to the large cities and fortresses and engaged to a very limited extent in agricultural activities.[1] "Let it be stated from the beginning," says Joshua Prawer, "the Crusaders' society was predominantly, almost exclusively, an urban society."[2] The Frankish urban society and the Muslim rural one were depicted as being almost totally segregated and as having very limited social, cultural, and geographical relations.

The interpretation which had prevailed until the end of the 1940s presented, while relying on the same sources, a totally different picture of Frankish society and of its relations with the local communities.[3] This interpretation assumed that the Franks had become highly assimilated with the local Oriental communities and that an integrated "Franco-Syrian society" consisting of the ruling Franks and of their autochthonous subjects was created during the period of the Crusades. As E. G. Rey wrote, the Franks and their indigenous subjects lived together not only in the countryside, but in the cities, in the mountains, in the ports, and even in the ranks of the Occidental army.[4]

[1] Cahen, 1950–1951, 286; Smail, 1956, 57–63; Prawer, 1980c, 102–142; Richard, 1980, 655; Hamilton, 1980, 90; Pringle, 1986a, 12; Pringle, 1989, 18–19; Benvenisti, 1970, 219 and 233, distinguished between Frankish villages, the number of which being "very small, less than ten." and manor houses which were quite numerous. Cf. Benvenisti, 1982. Cf. also Smail, 1973, 80; "Professor Prawer considers that nearly all Syrian Franks were townees, without roots in the countryside and, as always, his arguments are well grounded . . . The conclusion seems irresistible that Europeans were rare exceptions among a rural peasantry composed almost entirely of indigenous Syrians." [2] Prawer, 1980c, 102–103.

[3] Rey, 1866, 17–19; Dodu, 1914, 42–75; Madelin, 1916, 258–314; Madelin, 1918; Duncalf, 1916, 137–145; Grousset, 1934–1936, I, 287, 314; II, 141, 225, 264, 518, 615, 754–755; III, Intro. xiv-xv, and 57–59, 61–62; Johns, 1934. [4] Rey, 1866, 17.

The basic assumptions of this interpretation were rejected already in the 1950s by R. C. Smail and J. Prawer. Smail was the first to oppose the basic assumptions of the new model and those of the earlier model. In his famous *Crusading Warfare 1097–1193*, he wrote:

> The student is left to choose between two sharply differing conceptions of the nature of Franco-Syrian society. On the one hand are the scholars who have regarded the orientalizing of Frankish manners in Syria, and the instances which appear in the sources of friendly relations between Franks and Muslims, as evidence of the creation of a Franco-Syrian nation and civilization; on the other hand are those who have assigned greater importance to other aspects of social organization in the Latin states, and to the instances of hostile relations between Franks and Muslims. They consider that the Franks remained a ruling class, separated from their Syrian subjects by language and religion, with force as the ultimate sanction of their dominion.[5]

Smail did not challenge the information presented by the proponents of the former school, maintaining that the difference between the two approaches arises not from the uncovering of new information unbeknown to his predecessors but from different methods of interpreting the same information. His school attributed great importance to evidence of strained intercommunal relations and minimized the importance of evidence hinting at the assimilation of the Franks with the Oriental communities. The earlier school favored a completely different interpretation of the same facts and emphasized evidence of the good relations which purportedly existed between the Franks and the inhabitants of the occupied countries. Smail accepted, for example, that the Franks did employ Syrian doctors, cooks, servants, and artisans; that they "clothed themselves in eastern garments" and included "fruit and dishes of the country" in their diet; that their houses were planned according to Syrian style; that they "had dancing girls at their entertainments; professional mourners at their funerals; [that they] took baths; used soap [and] ate sugar."[6] However, according to Smail, all these habits were not indicative of cultural assimilation and did not testify to anything more than accommodation to the external conditions of life.

Smail argued that the historical interpretation of his predecessors was influenced by the expansionist ambitions of France on the eve of World War I and was aimed at proving the existence of the French "special genius" for colonial rule. The so called enlightened rule of the Franks in the Levant during the Middle Ages was purportedly one of the manifestations of this "genius." The basic assumptions on which both methods of interpretation are

[5] Smail, 1956, 40; cf. 62–63. [6] Smail, 1956, 43.

founded are called "conceptions" by Smail. According to him, it is the "conception" which establishes the relative importance of known facts, connects them, and vests them with social, economic, cultural, and political significance. In short, Smail's "conception" is the "model" of today.

Models, says Haggett, are a network of theories, laws, equations, or assumptions which indicate our attitude towards a world which we think we see. The construction of such models, he adds, "is inevitable because there is no fixed dividing line between facts and beliefs."[7] The term "model" is therefore used in this study even though many of the originators of the two contradictory approaches did not use it and that it is doubtful if they would have claimed to have developed "models" at all. Nonetheless it is a fact that more or less the same data led to the creation of two radically opposed interpretations, each of which was supported by the most prominent scholars of the relevant period: the one propounding the integration of the Franks into eastern society and the other, their total segregation.

Smail analysed the overt and covert basic assumptions of the "French model"; however, the model which he developed, together with Joshua Prawer, arguing that there was cultural and geographical segregation between the Franks and the local inhabitants, is explained by a series of assumptions each emerging from a previous assumption and sustaining all the others.

Therefore, the first aim of the present study will be to define the basic assumptions underlying the model developed by Smail and Prawer (called here for the sake of convenience the "existing model") which concludes that Frankish settlement in the Levant was of very limited scope.

The existing model – a segregated society

An "urban society"

The proponents of the existing model maintain that the Frankish settlement in the Levant was accompanied by a radical social metamorphosis which changed a largely rural society into an urban one. In accordance with this approach, the Crusaders preferred, or were forced to prefer, life in the cities or fortresses rather than in villages; and the Frankish society underwent, in fact, an accelerated process of urbanization. Prawer describes this change in the following words:

> The castle and the countryside, the two dominant features of the early Middle Ages that prevailed well into the central period . . . did not play the same role in the Latin

[7] Haggett, 1965, 23.

Near East . . . The new perspective [called here "the existing model"] . . . describes [the] Crusader society as mainly urban and the Syro-Palestinian cities not only as centers of urban, royal or seigniorial administration but also as the principal habitat of the Western conquerors and immigrants.[8]

The existence of large and well-protected cities in the Eastern Mediterranean, which were larger and better protected than most contemporary cities in the Latin West, enabled according to this model, the process of accelerated urbanization. The Eastern cities are perceived as having provided conditions of security and convenience which were preferable to the hard physical conditions and the shaky security which were the lot of the rural population. The Franks may not have been capable of building new cities, but they could appreciate the advantages of settling in the existing cities. Prawer claims that "The creation of the Crusaders' city-settlement and city population was conditioned and defined by the intrusion of a mainly agricultural and village-dwelling society into a country where the city had been for centuries an established and central institution."[9] The Levantine cities, which continued to serve during the whole course of history as centers of habitation and commerce, enabled and encouraged in their very existence this process of urbanization.

The lack of security: the external danger

The external and internal dangers are perceived as being the all-important element. It is assumed that the Franks were exposed to perpetual Muslim attacks which threatened their very existence and forced them to find shelter behind the fortified walls of the cities and fortresses: "the threat of invasion [was] almost continuous, but many of the subject peoples never fully consented to Latin rule, and on important occasions were to show themselves either doubtfully loyal or actively hostile."[10]

It should be noted that the exponents of the existing model were well aware of the fact (which will be discussed in full in the chapter dealing with criticism of the model) that the attacks from the external borders were not unremitting and certainly did not threaten the whole kingdom. Therefore they stressed another aspect of the security threat: the threat from within.

[8] Prawer, 1977, 179; cf. Smail, 1973, 67. [9] Prawer, 1980c, 102.

[10] Smail, 1956, 204. Cf. Cahen, 1940, 327: "Les caractères de l'occupation franque découlent essentiellement d'un fait, leur petit nombre. Se disperser au milieu de populations neutres ou hostiles eût constitué pour les Francs un danger de mort; aussi se groupent-ils dans un petit nombre de localitès. La masse des petites gens reste dans quelques villes . . . Dans les campagnes, l'occupation franque est totalement dèpourvue de base rurale."

Collaboration between the local population and the external enemy

According to the supporters of the existing model, the state of insecurity which compelled the Franks to settle in the fortified cities and fortresses emanated also from the fact that the autochthonous population was mainly Muslim and tended to collaborate with their fellow-religionists across the borders. The Franks, therefore, could not find peace even in the heart of their own Kingdom since the decisive majority of the country's inhabitants were Muslims. The protagonists of the existing model assumed, as a self-evident fact, that the process of Islamization of the local population had already reached such a stage by the twelfth century that the country was inhabited mainly by Muslims. Prawer writes: "The countryside was settled in an overwhelming majority by Muslims, but with a fair sprinkling of Oriental Christians of different denominations, whereas in Galilee there were additional Jewish agglomerations and in Samaria autochthonous Samaritan villages."[11]

The local Christians also preferred, according to this theoretical framework, to collaborate with the Muslims with whom they shared a common language and culture. Smail argues:

> All Syrian Christians, orthodox and monophysite, had lived for centuries under the generally tolerant Muslim rule of the caliphs . . . Between them and their Latin overlords there was the bond of a common faith, but they were tied also to the Muslims by history, language and habits. They gave the Franks no trouble, but they could regard the prospect of Muslim rule with equanimity . . . It would therefore appear that the native Christians provided no firm basis for Latin rule, and that they increased rather than alleviated the Franks' military problems.[12]

Even Claude Cahen, who accepted only part of these basic assumptions, tended to ascribe the existence of some of the Frankish fortresses to the internal danger. From the architectural structure of some of them he concluded that they were intended to serve as observation posts in the areas that were occupied by the Franks themselves:

> Les spécialistes de l'architecture militaire des Croisés n'ont peut-être pas porté une attention suffisante à la signification des châteaux qu'ils étudiaient. Implicitement, ils les considèrent comme destinés tous d'abord à la défense du territoire contre des ennemis extérieurs. Tel est évidemment le cas de ceux qui se trouvent aux points stratégiques des frontières successives. Mais beaucoup ne peuvent avoir eu d'autre fonction (comme aussi en Occident) que de surveiller des districts de l'intérieur.[13]

[11] Prawer, 1980e, 201. [12] Smail, 1956, 52. [13] Cahen, 1983, 169.

The tendency of the Oriental Christians to cooperate with the Muslims is attributed also to the Latin priests' taking the place of the Greek Orthodox clergy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Muslim rulers, it is claimed, had vested the Oriental Christians with broad autonomy in matters of religious rites and had allowed them to appoint their own religious leadership. Additional reasons for the probable tendency of the local Christians to cooperate with the Muslims were found in the fact that a not inconsiderable part of the Eastern Christian communities continued to live, during the whole course of the Frankish regime, in areas which were under Muslim control. The Eastern Christians had also probably felt humiliated because their legal status was inferior to that of the Franks, who had a separate legal system from that of the local Christians.[14]

The assumption that the Christian population shared a common language and culture with the Muslims within and across the border is actually composed of two additional assumptions, first that the Arabization of the Christian population of the Levant had been completed before the Frankish occupation[15] and second that the Arabization of the Turkish tribes, which constituted an appreciable part of the forces against whom the Franks had fought, had also been completed by the twelfth century, so that differences of language, culture, and customs between the local Christian population and the Muslim Turks were almost non-existent.[16]

The existing model does not excel in details concerning the processes of Islamization and Arabization of the local population, but the picture it presents does include two elements: first, that the local population had been subjected since the middle of the seventh century to a process of cultural assimilation into the ruling Arab-Muslim culture, a process which caused many of them to embrace Islam. Secondly, those local Christians who had not become Muslims by then had adopted the Arab-Muslim culture and the

[14] On the ousting of the Greek ecclesiastical hierarchy and for the confiscation of property belonging to the Greek church, see Raymond of Aguilers, 154; Matthew of Edesse, ed. *RHC*, ch. 21, 54–55; William of Tyre, 6, 23, 340. For the transfer of Greek property to the Latin monastery of Mt. Tabor, see Hospital, II, AI, 897–898. For the separate judiciary of Latins and local Christians, see Jean of Ibelin, I, ch. 4, 26. Cf. Hamilton, 1980, 161–163; Mayer, 1977, 1–33. The break between the Greek and the Latin clergy was apparently expressed also in the fact that only very few of the Latins knew Greek. See William of Tyre, 15, 21, 703. For the claim that the Muslims vested the Eastern churches with religious autonomy, see Sivan, 1967a.

[15] Hamilton, 1980, 159–169; Cahen, 1971, 285–292; Cahen, 1972, 62–63; Riley-Smith, 1977, 9–22.

[16] Prawer finds no substantive differences between Turkish Muslims and other Muslims. One can gather from his writings that he does not ascribe great importance to the Turkish influence, particularly within the boundaries of the Kingdom. See for example: "Within the frontiers of the Latin states there were virtually no turks or nomadic Turcomans . . . During the last quarter of the eleventh century when the Selchükid Turks, the secular arm of the 'Abbasids, pushed the Fatimids out of Syria and Palestine, there probably followed some strengthening of the Sunnah." Prawer, 1985b, 62.

use of the Arab language. It transpires from this approach that even if the Franks were not exposed to the risk of daily attacks from external enemies, those who dared to settle in the rural areas were exposed to danger from the potential hostility of the Arabized inhabitants – both Muslims and Christians.

The demographic ratio

According to the exponents of the existing model, the precarious existence of the Frankish states was still further aggravated by the demographic ratio which clearly favored the Muslim inhabitants of the country, whose numbers, although considerably depleted before and during the conquest, far exceeded those of the Frankish population. When they produce figures, some of these scholars maintained that the Frankish population constituted between 15% to 25% of the total population.[17]

The Crusader fortresses

The proponents of the existing model repeatedly emphasize the defensive or offensive role of the fortresses which were built by the Franks. Frankish settlement outside the bounds of the big cities is considered by them to be mainly of strategic value. The assumption that there was no Frankish rural settlement ruled out, in practice, any serious examination of the economic, administrative and symbolic roles of the fortresses:

> Ce qui caractérisé cette société féodale [wrote Jean Richard] c'est son caractère médiocrement rural . . . La population militaire du royaume, de la principauté, des comtés, est une population surtout urbaine. Elle reside soit dans les châteaux dont, très vite, les états latins se sont herissés: en effet, conscients de la faiblesse des effectifs qu'ils pouvaient opposer aux Musulmans, les Croisés ont mis sur pied tout un réseau de forteresses, quelques-unes formidables, d'autres plus modestes, qui garantissaient les territoires contre les invasions. Les seigneurs de ces châteaux, avec leurs propres vassaux, y resident pratiquement en permanence pour en assurer la garde.[18]

Even Smail, who conceded that the fortresses had administrative and economic roles in the organization of rural estates, considered these roles to be secondary to their strategic value.[19]

[17] Prawer, 1975, I, 570–571; Prawer, 1980c, 102–103, 117; Russell, 1985, 295–314; Benvenisti, 1970, 25–28. [18] Richard, 1980, 556.

[19] Compare Smail, 1956, 204–244, with Smail, 1951, 133–135, 143. It should be noted, however, that even though Smail does focus primarily on the military functions of the castle he makes the point (Smail, 1956, 60–62 and 209) that castles had other functions too as "the physical basis of overlordship" (Smail, 1956, 61).

The previous model – an integrated society

The former model, which was rejected by Smail and Prawer at the beginning of the fifties, presented, while relying on the very same sources, a totally different picture of Frankish society and of its relations with the local communities.[20] The proponents of this model claimed that the Crusades created an integrated society which consisted of the Franks and of their subjects. The Franks, they argued, were deeply influenced by the Oriental habits and were responsible for the unprecedented atmosphere of law, order, and tolerance which prevailed in Palestine during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. They claimed that the Frankish regime was a "régime de la tolérance en matière religieuse"; and that there was "résolution des vainqueurs de n'imposer aux anciens habitants de la contrée, en dehors des obligations féodales, l'humiliation d'aucune servitude politique."[21] Rey, Dodu, Madelin, Hayek, and Grousset idealized this alleged friendly relationship and did not make any distinction between the relations of the Franks with the local Christians and their relations with the Muslims. "Une seule chose est certaine," wrote Dodu, "c'est que, la race n'ayant pas été plus que la religion un obstacle, la fusion des deux sociétés s'opéra sous la sceptre des rois francs avec une rapidité à peine contrariée par l'état de guerre."[22] This idealization of the intercultural relationship, which Smail labeled "something more than [French] propaganda written with reference to a peace treaty,"[23] facilitated the creation of the existing model, which, in its turn, told a completely different story of social, political, and geographical segregation.

Smail's assumption that the previous model was influenced by French colonialistic sentiments is certainly feasible. The discussion of the sociological and intellectual background of the scholars is as legitimate as the discussion of their sources. Smail, who was very much ahead of his times, paved the way for a discussion of similar questions concerning himself and his co-thinkers. Is it possible, for example, that Prawer's dichotomous approach was influenced also by the manner in which Zionism interpreted the relations between the European immigrants and the local Muslim population? Similarly could some of the conceptions accepted today by the scholars have been influenced by the atmosphere of de-colonization in Britain after World War II? The idea that every model is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the contemporary cultural and political background is certainly true with respect to every study, including the present one.

[20] See n. 3. [21] Dodu, 1914, 75. [22] Dodu, 1914, 52–53; Cf. also Hayek, 1925.
[23] Smail, 1956, 41.

The existing model, developed by Smail and Prawer, sounds convincing and reasonable and has continued to influence scholarly thinking since it was formulated. The great influence of this model on the historiography of the Crusades and on the historical analysis of Frankish settlement in the Levant justifies a closer examination of each of its components.